



York Road Crusher Site

End of York Road, National Park

c.1904

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|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Use: | None | Historic Value: | 3 out of 5 |
| Materials: | Concrete | Architectural Value: | - out of 4 |
| NZHPT Registered: | Not registered | Technical Value: | 1 out of 2 |
| Legal Description: | Egmont National Park | Symbolic Value: | - out of 3 |
| | | Rarity Value: | 2 out of 2 |
| | | Townscape Value: | 1 out of 2 |
| | | Group Value: | - out of 2 |
| | | Overall Heritage Value: | 7 out of 20 |



There are not many descriptions of this site that do not describe it as one of New Zealand's first "Think Big" projects. The York Road Crusher and Quarry Project was a significant political maneuver as well as important economically and historically for the area.

In the early 1900's there was a significant shortage of aggregate (metal) that was suitable for the developing roads and railways in Taranaki. Consequently a suggestion was made to the Minister of Railways that a quarry be opened up on the slopes of Mt Egmont.

By 1901, drives were being made into the rock face to ascertain the quality of the rock that would be available. In 1902, after trialing it at a Wanganui railway crossing, it was decided by the government that although the rock was not as hard as commonly used river bed boulders, it had still withstood the tests acceptably well. As with many bureaucratic decision in the pioneering days though, this took time and it wasn't until 1904 that approval was given to begin construction works.

The project involved establishing a lower, mid and upper quarry and the crusher site which would process the rock mined from each. It was an extension of the Mount Egmont Branch line that linked the different parts of the operation.



By 1907 all of the construction had been completed - including permanent rail having been laid, two stone crushers were built, staff barracks had been provided (not far away), and other amenities and equipment had been organised. The use of concrete this early on was quite rare and obviously completed without the benefit of any modern machinery or technological advancements.

The crusher was operated by hydro-power. A dam was established on the Manganui River, which piped the water into the sand trap (a large hand-concreted bath). The water was then left to naturally settle so that the sand and sediment sunk to the bottom (which was then washed out the gates by the workers). The clear water was pumped along a riveted steel pipeline, across a stream and down to the crusher site. It was then used to drive the Pelton Wheel (which acted as the turbine). It was from this hydro-energy that the crusher was able to process the rock.

Rail Wagons with a side-tipping mechanism would bring rock to the Crusher from the quarries, along the railway line. After processing, the metal was fed into wagons below to be transported to the Waipuku junction where it would go on to it's necessary location.

The project continued to run smoothly until World War One when, like many enterprises, lower levels of government funding and significant labour shortages was detrimental to its success. This unfortunately left the lasting effect of the Upper Quarry being abandoned as it was no longer feasible. Along with this, rock from the Mid Quarry turned out to be of poor quality for roads and railways.

From 1925-1926, 50 000 tons of boulders and 30 000 tons of crushed metal was excavated from the site and transported to New Plymouth to be used on the Breakwater. Officially, records state that the Crusher was closed in 1928, however the New Plymouth Harbour Development again drew from the Lower Quarry in 1938 and so it was finally closed in the 1940s.

Again, the World War impacted upon this project, as the majority of the rail line was removed and used overseas instead, for the war effort in World War Two.

What remains today is a only a ghost of the project in its prime. The Barracks and cottages have all gone, leaving only foundations behind. Parts of the water line and rail line are still evident, however most have disappeared being removed intentionally or disintegrating with the passing of time. A large concrete bath is what remains of the Sand trap and the extant valves are still semi-operational. Perhaps the most impressive remnant though, is the concrete fortress-like structure, that speaks to the colossal structure that once was the actual crusher. This is all that remains of one of New Zealand's first "Think Big" projects, and the silence of the National Park setting pays testament to the hours of hard work put in by locals in years gone by.



Inner view of pipes and culverts which originally would have fed water wheel



Bibliography:

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